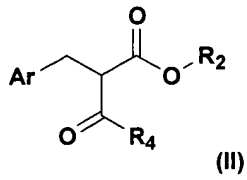
AMENDMENTS TO CLAIMS

Claims 1 to 11. (Cancelled).

Claim 12. (Previously Presented) A method of preparing a compound of formula II:



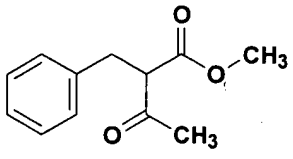
(II)

wherein R_2 and R_4 are independently C_1 to C_6 alkyl, the method comprising:
reacting at least five molar equivalents of R_4-C(O)-CH_2-C(O)O-R_2 with one molar equivalent of $ArCH_2Cl$ wherein Ar is C_6 or C_{10} aromatic group that can be substituted with C_1 to C_6 alkyl or halo, wherein the reaction is conducted in a solution consisting essentially of the reactants and no more than 1.2 molar equivalents of a base source of sodium, potassium, or lithium C_2 to C_6 alkoxide, which can be provided in the corresponding alcohol.

Claim 13. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the alkoxide concentration in the base source is at least 3 M.

Claim 14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 12, wherein in the compound of formula II Ar is phenyl and R^2 and R^4 are each methyl.

Claim 15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 12, wherein R_4–C(O)–CH_2–C(O)O–R_2– is ethyl acetoacetate, $ArCH_2Cl$ is benzylchloride and the compound of formula II is



Claim 16. (Previously Presented) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein R_4–C(O)–CH_2–C(O)O–R_2 is ethyl acetoacetate.

Claim 17. (Previously Presented) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein $ArCH_2Cl$ is benzyl chloride.

Claim18. (Currently Amended) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein the base source is sodium ~~chloride~~ ethoxide in ethanol.

Claim 19. (Currently Amended) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein ~~R_4-C(0)-CH_2-(O)O-R_2~~ R_4-C(O)-CH_2-(O)O-R_2 is ethyl acetoacetate, $ArCH_2Cl$ is benzyl chloride and the base source is sodium ethoxide in ethanol.

Claim 20. (Previously Presented) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein the compound formed is ethyl-2-benzyl acetoacetate.

Claim 21. (Cancelled).